

Vienna,

July 13, '87.

4X

Letter about

Dhamma in one's work.
Dear Susie,

Sarah wrote to me that, during your recent visit in Hong Kong you discussed with Jonothan the lack of mindfulness in your job, in your working situation. It is difficult to be mindful when one is in a hurry to finish one's work. We know that there is no reason why there cannot be mindfulness during one's work, but, ^(as) Jonothan said, the working situation seems like another world. The reason is that we become caught up with such a great deal of ignorance.

Before we can develop understanding of realities through mindfulness of them we should know what Dhamma is, where it is and when it appears. Dhamma is everything which is real, it arises everywhere in any situation and all the time. Dhamma is also in our working situation but we need to consider this more before we really grasp this. When we traveled with Khun Sujin in India I copied some tapes of her lectures which were played in the bus. I recently listened again to a lecture in which Khun Sujin explained different aspects of mindfulness, sati. Sati is heedful or watchful in the wholesome way. There are different kinds and degrees of sati. There may be thinking with sati in the right way about aspects of life. Sati arising with thinking is not the same as direct awareness of mental phenomena, nāma, and physical phenomena, rūpa, which appear one at a time. However, intellectual understanding of Dhamma can condition direct understanding of realities. There may not yet be conditions for direct awareness but learning about different aspects of sati can remind us that everything in life is Dhamma. When one knows how to be aware any object can condition awareness. We may realize without thinking that each reality in life is conditioned, not self.

a)

In our working situation we are generally with other people. Most of the time we think about them with attachment or with aversion.

← However, instead of unwholesome consciousness, akusala citta, there may be sati arising with wholesome consciousness, kusala citta, which considers people's different accumulated inclinations which are conditioned. →

← People walk, gesticulate and speak differently, because of different conditioning factors. When we meet someone who is conceited or egoistic we may, instead of having aversion, realize that the way this person behaves is

conditioned by accumulated inclinations and tendencies to conceit, attachment and ignorance. We may try to think of good points of other people but it may happen that we find none. Then we can still think of him with understanding of his accumulations → and there . may be compassion.

Someone who assists me → with my household wanted to express her gratefulness to me and gave me chocolates. She arranged them with loving care on a plate and then handed these to me. People give in different ways, with → negligence or with loving care. When one notices different : inclinations one can be reminded that people are nāma and rūpa which arise because of their appropriate conditions.

During our journey in India we discussed different results of giving which are done . in different ways. Some people may often find something : . unpleasant in their food, such as a small stone or a fly. This is conditioned. It may be the result of carelessness . with the preparation of one's gift in the past.

There are opportunities time and again to consider people's different accumulated tendencies. We can see that people's drawings and paintings are different. Their different cittas which condition the movement of their hands when they . draw and paint cause such works of art to be so different. Also when we watch people on T.V. we can consider the conditions which make people act and speak so differently. We are often infatuated with the stories we watch, but in between there can be moments of wholesome thinking with sati, or there can be conditions for direct awareness of conditioned realities.

Not only when we look at people, also when we . notice flowers and fruits we can, instead of being attached, consider conditions with sati. There is such a great variety of colours. Colour is a kind of rūpa and in the case of flowers and fruits it is produced by the element of heat. Colours are different because of different conditions. When there : is not yet direct awareness of realities we may → be reminded that all that appears has its appropriate conditions. That is Dhamma in daily life.

One of the aspects of sati which was mentioned by Khun Sujin was considering happiness that was in the past. We cling to our memories and we like to dwell on them. However we can realize the truth that what is gone already will never return. If we understand

that there isn't anything which can stay we will be less overcome by sadness. We have read in the scriptures about the eight vicissitudes of life or worldly conditions: gain and loss, praise and blame, honour and dishonour, happiness and misery. In one of your letters you wrote that we like to have the four favourable ones for the benefit of ourselves. There are time and again gain and loss, praise and blame also in our working situation. There may be loss of money, in business, loss of customers, loss of popularity. There may be days that all the odds are against us and that we are not feeling well. Instead of having aversion we may realize with sati that pleasant or unpleasant results are conditioned, that they are produced by kamma, deeds done in the past. When we are praised we may realize at once that ^(a type of nama) there is hearing, which is result of kamma and does not last. When one remembers this there will be less attachment and conceit. My husband had to preside over a committee dealing with complicated budget matters, and he received great praise. When he receives praise he realizes immediately that there is one day praise the next day blame. We have often discussed together the worldly conditions and thus there are conditions to remember them when they occur in daily life. Again, Dhamma is never lacking in our working situation.

We tend to forget the truth of impermanence but a dead body can function as a symbol or sign which reminds us that life is unsure, that it cannot last. When we read in the ^{newspapers} about people who are killed in wars, who are murdered or die in accidents we can be reminded about death which is sure to come. It is beneficial to know that there is Dhamma in the newspaper and in books and magazines. We should not avoid reading them and develop right understanding naturally. If we are able to be reminded of ... impermanence when we see a dead body or hear about death we should know that it is the citta with sati which realizes it, not self.

We read in the scriptures that the Buddha used parables to illustrate points of the teachings. We read in the "Gradual Sayings" (Book of the Sevens, Ch VII, The Great Chapter, par. 10, Wheel-Wright) that the Buddha spoke about a teacher Wheel-Wright who long ago taught his disciples:

Short is the life of man, O brāhmaṇa, insignificant, trifling, fraught with much ill, with much trouble. By mantras awaken (the people)! Do good! Live the godly life! For the born there is no immortality.

We then read that he used several parables in order to point out the shortness of life:

Just as a drop of dew on the tip of a blade of grass, when the sun gets up, straightway dries up and lasts not a while; even so, brāhmaṇa, like a dew-drop is the life of man.....

Just as a bubble appears on the water when the sky-deva rains down big drops, but straightway bursts and lasts not a while; even so, brāhmaṇa, like a water-bubble is the life of man....

Just as a mountain river, winding here and there, swiftly flowing, taking all along with it, never for a moment or for an instant or for a second pauses, but rushes on, swirls along and sweeps forward; even so, brāhmaṇa, like a mountain river is the life of man....

(flowing)

When we actually see a water bubble or a river we can be reminded of impermanence. The symbols which can serve as reminders of the truth are inexhaustible. There is Dhamma in work and recreation, when we watch nature.

Another aspect of sati concerns the remembrance of bad deeds or good deeds. We may think with regret which accompanies akusala citta rooted in aversion about bad deeds we did. We can also consider the disadvantages and dangers of unwholesomeness and this can urge us right away to develop the right understanding which can eradicate defilements. We can think of our good deeds with attachment to "our kusala" or with conceit. When sati arises we can think with kusala citta about our good deeds, we may realize that they are conditioned, and that they are not self, anattā. If there were no confidence in wholesomeness and sati which is heedful there could not be the arising of kusala citta.

We can each day reflect with sati about the ways of wholesomeness for which there is an opportunity on that day. During our journey in India my Thai friends thought each day of what the monks would need and carefully prepared all the gifts for them. They remembered which gifts they had to take out of their luggage on a particular day, how many robes and bags for the monks were needed. At the different holy places we offered glasses with waxine lights, incense, flowers and scented water. When we take these things out of our luggage and carry them we can do so thoughtlessly, but if sati arises there is kusala citta, and when there are conditions there can be awareness of nāma and rūpa.

Also when we are in our home or office we can consider which ways of wholesomeness we can perform on this or that day . Even a kind word or gesture is a way of wholesomeness we should not think insignificant. A simple phrase "How are you" which is often said thoughtlessly can be said with real concern for someone else's welfare , with lovingkindness. When kindness is sincere it can be noticed as such by others. When we are in conversation with others there is another way of wholesomeness we can practise: we can praise good qualities we notice in others. This is a form of generosity, namely "anumodhana dāna" (anumodhana means thanksgiving). At such a moment there is sympathetic joy (mudita) about other people's wholesomeness and this is a quality we should develop. ← When

) someone else receives something pleasant or is honoured there are again opportunities to develop sympathetic joy. We may at times be jealous about someone else's prosperity or progress in wholesomeness, but when there is sympathetic joy there is no jealousy.

We can use many different opportunities for wholesomeness in the midst of our work. Most of the time we are thinking with akusala citta .However, when we consider the different aspects of sati it can condition more wholesomeness. →

The examples I have given above can remind us that Dhamma is present always and everywhere. You once wrote to me :

Dhamma makes you think, really, and it is completely about life, really. It is so simple that we miss it all the time.

Considering Dhamma in our life helps us to see that any object can condition awareness. There may be moments of thinking with sati about a dead body, about happiness which has gone and will never return, about other people's accumulated inclinations, and then there may be ← awareness of any reality which appears. Also thinking can be realized as only an experience which is conditioned. Then one will cling less to an idea of self who thinks.

Another aspect of sati mentioned on the tape, is sati arising while one listens to the teachings. There can be direct awareness of realities while one listens to the teaching about different types of cittas, ← cetasikas and rūpas. Another aspect of sati is sati which arises when we know where to find a particular text in the scriptures. There may be dosa when we cannot find a text we need, but there can also be patience and right remembrance of the

location of the text. There is another aspect of sati with respect to the grouping of realities according to certain numbers, for example: the four noble Truths, the five khandhas, the five hindrances ... and the eightfold Path. These groupings helps us to remember realities . . . sati can arise and be aware of any reality which appears, also when it is thinking about numbers. It is not self who remembers classifications but a type of nāma which is conditioned. There could not be such remembrance if we had not learnt the grouping of realities. Thus, there are many opportunities for wholesomeness when we listen to the teachings, look up texts and remember classifications. If we had not heard about such opportunities we would neglect them . It is unpredictable when there will be thinking with sati and when direct awareness of realities, it depends on conditions.

Another aspect of sati is awareness of impermanence. There can only be realization of the arising and falling away of a nāma or rūpa which appears when understanding clearly knows nāma as nāma and rūpa as rūpa. We may not be sure when the reality which appears is for example the rūpa which is visible object and when the nāma which is seeing. They seem to appear together. When we learn to be aware of one reality at a time understanding will gradually distinguish nāma from rūpa, and later on realize impermanence. *(be able to) (their)*

The sati of the sotāpanna is another aspect of sati: →

← The sotāpanna has eradicated wrong view and sees realities as they are. The sati of the sotāpanna has become firm and unshakable, it can arise in any kind of situation. The Buddha's disciples who attained enlightenment had to begin like all of us. They listened to the Dhamma, considered it and learnt gradually to be aware. The development of understanding is with ups and downs and one has to continue to be aware of realities in daily life in order to eradicate wrong view.

Sarah told me about a friend who repeats to herself reminders about sati and she was wondering whether that is not forcing. It depends with what kind of citta one repeats such reminders. In the Buddha's time the teachings had not been committed to writing and they could only be preserved by the repeating of the texts. While one does so there may be considering of the Dhamma .Or there may be conditions for direct awareness of whatever reality appears. One may also repeat reminders with clinging to an idea of "my sati". Khun Sujin warned us time and again that attachment has many faces and that it lures us all the time. Any kind of wholesomeness can be

spoiled and is often spoiled by attachment. We have accumulated attachment and it arises time and again, but we may learn to detect it when it arises. Some people told me that they want to reserve a fixed time for sati : and that they want to make an effort for sati. We try because we want to possess sati or to control it, but that is wrong effort. We fail to see that sati is not self. A friend wrote to me that she had been sick and then .. noticed that awareness did not come to her mind at all. This teaches us how anattā sati is. If there are no conditions it cannot arise. If one could only see that there is Dhamma (all the time.) .. the development of understanding could be more natural. There are many moments of ignorance of realities but even ignorance can be object of mindfulness. Also ignorance should be known as it is: not self.

You discussed with Sarah the Middle Way: avoiding to try in an unnatural way to have sati with an idea of self behind it, and on the other hand avoiding carelessness and infatuation with all the pleasant things of life. You remarked that your problem was: "being too natural, not taking the Dhamma seriously enough and thus carrying on happily for months at a time forgetting it and hardly pulling out a book or tape." The Middle Way is extremely difficult, Khun Sujin reminded us, because attachment keeps on deluding us. Listening, considering, repeating, these are all conditions which have to be built up, so that one day there can be direct awareness of one reality at a time, a nāma or a rūpa. You may not pull out books or tapes, but can you not "listen" to the Dhamma : around you?

I repeated the different aspects of sati because we have to hear and consider more details of the teachings, they all help. Khun Sujin said time and again: "Sati is sañkhārakkhandha, the khandha of activities or formations, which has to be built up." All conditioned realities can be classified as five khandhas: the khandhas of rūpa, feelings, remembrance or "perception" (saññā) , activities or formations and consciousness (viññāna). In the khandha of activities or formations, sañkhārakkhandha, are all cetasikas (mental factors) other than feeling and remembrance included. Both wholesome qualities, sobhana cetasikas, and unwholesome qualities, akusala cetasikas, are sañkhārakkhandha . Sati is among the sobhana cetasikas. When kusala citta arises it is accompanied by sati and other wholesome qualities. Kusala citta and the accompanying cetasikas arise and then fall away,

but .. kusala can be accumulated so that there are conditions for their arising again later on. Patience, lovingkindness, generosity,

sati and intellectual understanding of the teachings all contribute to the building up of the right conditions for direct awareness and understanding of realities. We cannot pinpoint which good qualities or moments of listening and considering today condition direct understanding at some future moment.. When it is said that sati is saṅkharakkhandha which has to be built up it is another way of showing that direct awareness is not self, that it arises when the right conditions are there.

When there can be direct awareness of seeing, visible object or any other reality one will know the difference between direct awareness of a reality and the thinking of stories or concepts which occurs in between. When we perceive a chair or a piano there is thinking of a story (and this is different from) the experience of what appears through the eyesense, of visible object. When we know the difference we will be less infatuated with concepts or "conventional realities". We should not force ourselves not to think of concepts. We may, for example, perceive holes in the street and if we would not think of them we would fall. We need to think (of concepts) in order to take care of our body, in order to eat, to recognize people and speak to them. We think time and again of concepts but there can be awareness in between, that is why awareness can be natural. We may think of a person who is walking and then sati can follow and in this way there can be a degree of detachment from concepts and stories.

I just now received a letter from our friend Alan Driver who reminded me that detachment is the path and detachment is the goal. When we are infatuated with pleasant objects we are off the path, and when we are overeager for result of the practice we are off the path. I quote from Alan's letter which I like to share with others:

... The goal is detachment ,nothing else. Surely, if the insidious power that constitutes lobha infiltrates systematically into the quest for wholesomeness,for wisdom, and supposedly for detachment, then we are doomed.

In response to evidence from Dhamma students at Wat Bovorn yesterday that they were too greedy for sati, Khun Sujin reminded them that they should be very grateful for all the other signs of progress that were manifesting themselves, even if . . . understanding had not yet been developed enough to directly experience,clearly and confidently, the various realities of our daily life that we take for a solid, enduring world. She was talking about the fact that so many

of us have acquired a good deal of rather deep and detailed understanding from listening , which is a condition for all the direct wisdom we seek, if only we could be patient enough to stop interfering in the process with all our lobha, and just let the various conditions operate together as saṅkhārakkhandha , in the fashion to which they are accustomed and in the only way they can, to produce the right result. The listening is so good, it is providing food. Then the considering, remembering what has been heard and considering it at various levels, with regard to personal relations, to private thoughts and to ultimate realities, and that quietly, without fuss, as conditions permit. Countless aeons have brought us to this point. We clearly cannot expect that it will necessarily all be over in just a few years.... I do think that we all need to be reminded that we should be aiming for,encouraging, a little detachment in our lives. The actual seeing of it is some sort of indication that we are on the right track. We have to have confidence in the right path , the right conditions. When everything is there already but we want to add another factor,that is our own desire for results for our "mythical"(non-existent) selves, then we are off the path.We clearly at such moments have no confidence in the ability of the relevant cetasikas to do their job, and we add one more, or maybe two, namely attachment,lobha, or perhaps wrong view, ditṭhi....

Detachment is the goal but for the time being we are attached to all objects. When we look at a house, an animal or a person we are immediately absorbed with attachment in concepts. The experience of visible object, seeing, is neither kusala nor akusala, it is vipāka, the result of kamma. Thinking of concepts is done by cittas which are either kusala citta or akusala citta. We may not realize that thinking of concepts, defining or interpreting what was seen, is done mostly with attachment. When right understanding sees that there is actually clinging to what is insignificant, to illusions and mirages, the disadvantages of such enslavement will be understood. One will gradually change one's ideas of what is worth while in one's life and one will see as one's goal the eradication of defilements.

We read in the Gradual Sayings (Book of the Fives, Ch XVII,Malice ., par. 10,Bhaddaji) that . . . Ānanda asked Bhaddaji,while . . . he was near Kosambi, in Ghosita Park, what is the best of sights, the best of sounds, the best of joys, the best of conscious states and the best of becomings. We read that Bhaddaji answered that the best of sights

is the sight of Brahmā who is overcome by none overcome. He said that the best of sounds are the cries of joy uttered by the devas of radiant splendour; that the best of joys is the joy of the all-lustrous devas who rejoice in quiet; that the best of conscious states is that of the devas who go to the sphere of nothingness; that the best of becomings is that of the devas who go to the sphere of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness. Ānanda then explained to Bhaddaji:

When, while one looks ,the cankers are destroyed--that is the best of sights.

When, while one listens ,the cankers are destroyed-- that is the best of sounds.

When, while one rejoices, the cankers are destroyed--that is the best of joys.

When, while one is conscious, the cankers are destroyed--that is the best of conscious states.

When, while one has become, the cankers are destroyed--that is the best of becomings.

With mettā,
Nina.